

KSU History

Since its doors first opened on October 11, 1887, Kentucky State University has played a critical role in providing opportunities for students seeking access to higher education in Kentucky. The school's founding is linked directly to a small cadre of teachers who were graduates of Berea College, which at the time was the only institution of higher learning available for African Americans in the state. The teachers' vision embraced the ideal that a school dedicated to the sole purpose of training teachers for the African-American school-age population was both needed and could have positive and far-reaching effects. Led by John H. Jackson, a teacher in Lexington, the group petitioned legislators to lobby for a school. On May 17, 1886, a majority of the legislators voted affirmatively and passed an act that authorized both a charter and funds for the school. Jackson later was selected to become the school's first president.

The State Normal School for Colored Persons became only the second institution of higher learning approved to receive state-level financial support from the commonwealth. Several cities competed for an opportunity to host the school. The offer made by the capital city of Frankfort was accepted largely because it included the donation of a 24-acre tract of land on which the school could be built.

The journey from normal school to university spanned a period of 86 years, from 1886 to 1972, and included five name changes. In 1890, provisions under the Second Morrill Act enabled State Normal to acquire land grant status. This represented the first shift in curriculum design. The departments of agriculture, domestic economy, and mechanics and manual training were added along with a new emphasis on the creation of new knowledge and public service. Gradually, in addition to offering the two-year teacher training program, the school expanded to include educational offerings targeting primary- and secondary-level students.

The impact of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute philosophy, coupled with the broader progressive education movement, influenced Kentucky legislators to adopt the industrial education model for the school. The State Normal School for Colored Persons became Kentucky Normal and Industrial Institute in 1902. By the early 1930s, however, KNII began to re-emphasize a classical education. The institution transitioned to a four-year college in 1938, gained accreditation in 1939 through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and has since been approved for reaccreditation on a continual basis. The institution finally acquired university status and began offering graduate programs in 1972.

Today, with President Mary Evans Sias at the helm as its 13th president, Kentucky State University has evolved into the most diverse institution in the state. Moreover, KSU continues to embrace the ideals of its founders, a value for access to education and a commitment to service, along with its land grant programs and a strong liberal studies core that prepares students well for life in a global community.

KSU Presidents: Past and Present

John Jackson	1887-1898
James E. Givens	1898-1900
James S. Hathaway	1900-1907
John H. Jackson	1907-1910
James S. Hathaway	1910-1912
Green P. Russell	1912-1923
Francis M. Wood	1923-1924
Green P. Russell	1924-1929
Rufus B. Atwood	1929-1962
Carl M. Hill	1962-1975

W. A. Butts	1975-1982
Raymond M. Burse	1982-1989
Mary L. Smith, Interim	1989-1990
John T. Wolfe	1990
Mary L. Smith	1990-1998
George W. Reid	1998-2002
Paul E. Bibbins, Interim	2002
William Turner, Interim	2003-2004
Mary E. Sias	2004-present



KENTUCKY STATE UNIVERSITY
1886-2014

